

SEQUENCING OF EVENTS IN THE SLAVE NARRATIVE OF HENRY "BOX" BROWN

A LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN

GRADES 6-8

Overview

Henry "Box" Brown was born into slavery and used a variety of strategies to craft his own freedom. These included careful planning before taking action, seeking the assistance of friends and members of the anti-slavery society, and relying on personal qualities such as determination, perseverance, and his belief in God. This lesson highlights the importance of the order or sequence of events and how they give meaning and interest to a story. This sequence must not only make sense, but should engage the attention of the audience so they want to know what happens next. Students will work in groups to analyze segments of Brown's narrative and identify critical events in his story—including those beyond his control, like the death of his master, and those within his control, like the actions he took to obtain his freedom. As students read assigned chapters of the narrative, they will expand and refine vocabulary skills, understand techniques of sequencing events to create a compelling story, learn about the hardships of slave life, and improve analysis and comprehension skills when reading a historical work of non-fiction. As a final assignment, students will write a letter describing the escape of Henry "Box" Brown and the ways that he "crafted his own freedom."

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Recall who Henry "Box" Brown was and why he is a significant American.
- Provide examples of some of the great hardships of slavery.
- Describe Brown's daring escape from slavery in a box.
- Recall the events in at least one chapter from Brown's own narrative.
- Describe the sequence of some of the important events in the life of Henry "Box" Brown.
- Explain why the order of events in a story is important.
- Describe methods used by Brown to craft his freedom.

Guiding Questions

Why did Henry "Box" Brown risk his life by shipping himself from the South to the North in a box? Would the story be the same if critical events in Brown's life were reordered?

Suggested Time

1-2 class periods

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Review Teacher Tool 1, which provides a brief overview of Henry “Box” Brown’s life. You may read a longer biography of Brown at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownbox/menu.html>.
2. View the short video, *One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom*, about Brown and his daring escape from slavery. Be prepared to show this video to your class using a projector or individual computers.
3. For information on the structure of a typical North American slave narrative, you can visit the Documenting the American South website at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>.
4. Review and print Student Handout 1, which contains the seven chapters of Henry “Box” Brown’s narrative. Divide Student Handout 1 into chapters and make copies so different chapters can later be distributed to each of seven groups. For example, if there are 35 students in your classroom, divide 35 by 7 and you will have seven groups (1 chapter per group) of five students. Make five copies of Chapter 1, five copies of Chapter 2, etc. so each student in a group has a copy of the chapter their group will read.
5. Review and print Student Handout 2, which defines difficult vocabulary in Brown’s narrative. This Student Handout is broken into seven chapters to follow the narrative. Each student should only get a copy of the page associated with their assigned chapter.
6. Review and print Student Handout 3, which students will use to list the critical events that occurred in their assigned chapter.
7. Review Student Handout 4, which provides instructions for students to follow in writing a letter describing Brown’s escape from slavery. As an optional step to gather more information, you can review the Edsitement website for another example of a lesson plan related to the writing assignment at http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=294. The Edsitement lesson plan features a similar writing assignment focused on letter writing with emphasis on documenting history through the use of personal letters and journaling.

Teaching the Lesson (Suggested Steps)

1. Open this lesson plan by showing *One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom* to students to engage their interest in his story and the actions he took to “craft his freedom.” Before showing the video, tell students to pay attention to the important events and actions that take place because there will be a discussion and later assignment based on this important information.
2. After students view the video, ask them what steps Brown took to make sure his escape was successful. Record the responses on a flip chart or blackboard.
3. Tell your students that they will next find out why Brown was so determined to escape slavery. They will discover what events occurred in his life and what actions he took in response.
4. Divide the class into seven groups, one for each chapter of Henry “Box” Brown’s narrative. Ask each group to choose a recorder and a reporter. Assign each group one chapter to read and distribute the copies of the chapters in Student Handout 1. Be sure to explain to students why they might see typographical errors, misspellings, and the use of United Kingdom English spellings for certain words within the narrative. Remind them to consider the time period and the limited resources that printing houses and individual writers had and not to assume that any errors in spelling are reflective of

- Brown's intelligence.
5. Distribute Student Handout 2, which provides the definitions for difficult vocabulary words organized by chapter, and Student Handout 3, which students will use to list critical events found in their assigned chapter.
 6. Provide time for students to read the assigned chapter from Brown's narrative. After they have read their assigned chapter, ask them to work in their groups to identify the 10-15 most important events that occurred in their chapter and to list them on Student Handout 3. Explain to them that each chapter will have many events that vary in importance and that it is their job to read the narrative and to work together to determine which 10-15 events are the most critical in recounting Henry "Box" Brown's story from that chapter. Ask the recorder for each group to write the final list of events on Student Handout 3.
 7. Ask the reporter from each group to share the important events from their chapter in sequential order so that the class will be familiar with Brown's entire narrative.
 8. Lead a discussion about the sequence of events that took place in the fascinating narrative of Henry "Box" Brown. To illustrate the importance of sequence, shift some of the events and actions around and ask students how the story is changed. For example, if Brown shipped himself to Philadelphia in a box before his wife and family were sold, how would this change the story? If the order of events were thus changed, the story would be about a man who selfishly deserted his family in order to gain freedom for himself. The location of the sale of his family in Brown's story is important to understanding the sequence of events in his life as well as one motive for why Brown escaped.
 9. In preparation for the writing assignment in Student Handout 4, review the important sequence of events that led to Henry "Box" Brown's daring escape from slavery in a box. Be sure to cover the events that led him to plan and execute his escape. Distribute Student Handout 4 and discuss the letter-writing assignment with your class.

Assessment (Optional)

Review the Assessment, if you decide to use one of the options, print the document for distribution to your students. The following are two assessment options (both are included in the single Assessment document):

1. The student letter created during the lesson would be appropriate to assess students' understanding of the important events in Henry "Box" Brown's life. This assessment option provides a rubric that could be used to assess students' letters. You may choose to assign numerical values to the rubric to match your grading scale.
2. Students create a timeline of the important events in the life of Henry "Box" Brown. Students may write and create an illustration corresponding with important events. A list of important events out of order is provided for students' reference as well as a template for a timeline. An answer key, detailing the important events in the life of Henry "Box" Brown, is also provided.